

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2619

INFO AMCONSUL ISTANBUL

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EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINS, GR

SUBJECT: HOLY SYNOD DEBATES YIAROS ISLAND PRISON CONDITIONS

1. DAVID TONGE STORY IN GUARDIAN FEBRUARY 25 CLAIMED HOLY SYNOD "IS SENDING LETTER OF PROTEST TO PM ANDROUTSOPOULOS, CALLING FOR HIS INTERVENTION TO IMPROVE CONDITIONS IN ISLAND DEPORTATION CAMP OF YIAROS." HE SAID LETTER ALSO CALLED FOR RELEASE OF THOSE PRISONERS AGAINST WHOM THERE ARE NO SPECIFIC CHARGES. IMPETUS FOR LETTER REPORTEDLY ORIGINATED WITH BISHOP OF SIROS IN WHOSE SEE YIAROS LOCATED AND BISHOP OF ELEFTHEROPOULIS. LETTER SAID TO HAVE BEEN SIGNED BY ARCHBISHOP SERAPHIM AND ALL MEMBERS OF SYNOD. BBC AND VOA CARRIED TONGE ARTICLES. GREEK PRESS HAS PRINTED NOTHING.

2. CHURCH OFFICIAL CONFIRMED EMBOFF THAT SYNOD DEBATED BAD CONDITIONS ON YIAROS AT MID-FEBRUARY SESSION AND AFTER CONSIDERABLE ARGUMENT AND TENSION DRAFT LETTER WITH FAIRLY SPECIFIC CRITICISMS APPROVED. SOURCE, HOWEVER, DID NOT BELIEVE SERAPHIM PRESENT THIS SESSION, NOR THAT LETTER HAD YET BEEN SENT TO GOG SINCE LACKING SIGNATURE OF SERAPHIM WHO HAS BEEN AWAY FROM OFFICE IN RECENT

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WEEKS.

3. COMMENT: BISHOP OF SIROS, WHO HAD DIOCESAN RESPONSIBILITY FOR YIAROS SINCE 1965, HAS NEVER PREVIOUSLY CRITICIZED DETENTION CENTER THERE, AND BISHOP OF ELEFTHEROPOULIS IS UNPOPULAR LOUDMOUTH. THEY THUS APPEAR UNLIKELY TEAM TO STIMULATE SYNOD TO FIRST FORMAL PROTEST AGAINST GOG PRISONER POLICY. TONGE, WHEN QUERIED ALONG THESE LINES, NOTED THEY ARE, NONETHELESS, "CUNNING" AND SAID WIFE OF YIAROS PRISONER NIKOLAS PSAROUDAKIS, PUBLISHER OF BANNED CHRISTIANIKI, HAS WRITTEN ALL THE BISHOPS BEGGING SOME ACTION ON BEHALF HUSBAND. LIKELY, THEREFORE, THAT HUMANITARIAN IMPULSE WAS INFLUENTIAL FACTOR THIS INITIATIVE. THIS NEW SYNOD HAS APPEARED EAGER TO IMPROVE ITS PASTORAL IMAGE, FOR EXAMPLE, AS THROUGH ITS ADOPTION TWO WEEKS AGO OF ORPHAN WHOSE PLIGHT WELL PUBLICIZED AT TIME. ALSO LIKELY THAT BISHOP PANTELEIMON OF CORINTH, WHO APPEARS VERY INFLUENTIAL WITHIN SYNOD AND WHO INDEBTED TO PSAROUDAKIS FOR LATTER'S EDITORIAL DEFENSE TWO YEARS AGO WHEN IERONYMOS WAS ATTEMPTING FORCE PANTELEIMON TO RESIGN, MAY HAVE ENGINEERED SYNOD'S CONSENSUS.

4. WE BELIEVE SERAPHIM PRESSURED BY THIS DEVELOPMENT. AS THE GOG'S HAND-PICKED ARCHBISHOP, HE PRESUMABLY DID NOT WELCOME SYNODICAL AND PUBLIC FOCUS ON THE EMBARRASSING ISSUE OF OFFICIAL TREATMENT OF PRISONERS. YET HE KNOWS THAT HIS PREDECESSOR, IERONYMOS, HAS BEEN WIDELY CONDEMNED, AND BY MANY SYNODICAL BISHOPS, FOR HAVING KEPT SECRET TWO PERSONAL APPEALS ON BEHALF OF PRISONERS MADE IN 1969 AND ONLY MADE PUBLIC TWO MONTHS AGO. SERAPHIM IS ALSO AS EAGER TO KEEP UP HIS HUMANITARIAN IMAGE. HE MIGHT FIND A BUREAUCRATIC WAY TO TABLE THE LETTER, BUT MORE LIKELY HE WILL GO ALONG AND DISPATCH THE LETTER, WHICH COULD CREATE MORE RIPPLES IN CHURCH-STATE RELATIONS.

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